

THE 108TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL TRAVELOGUE

*

THE FACTS, FIGURES AND SCENES

COVERING TEN MONTHS OF OPERATIONS

IN THE EUROPEAN THEATRE OF WAR

*

COMPILED AND PUBLISHED

BY THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 108TH EVACUATION HOSPITAL

JUNE 1945

Dedicated to

THE COMBAT FORCES OF THE ALLIED NATIONS

who stormed the beaches of France and drove the enemy of human liberty into his lair, where they destroyed him. These men suffered and gave their lives, not for an Army or a Nation, but for the principals of decency of mankind.

SERVING THEM WAS AN HONOR.

108 1945

INMEMORIAM

RENNES, FRANCE August 1944

TURNER, ORAB.
SEXTON, JOHN M.
PANARELLO, LETTERIO A.

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

St. John 111. 16.



James E. Yarbrough, Colonel Medical Corps, USA Commanding



143650

I wish to express my appreciation to the following members of the 108th in compiling and editing this book:

lst Lt. WALTER R. CHALK Capt. ALANSON HIGBIE Capt. ELLIS JONES lst Lt. MARGARET T. SADLER (ARC) JANE STEWART (ARC) ISABEL MACGREGOR Pfc FRANK F. BADE Cpl. JAMES H. CAGLE T/Sgt GEORGE E. HUBBARD S/Sgt STEPHEN C. HUDAK Tec 3 RICHARD P. HURLEY Tec 5 PHILIP LA SALA Tec 5 GEORGE E. MICKLE Tec 5 WALTER D. OKRONGLEY Sgt. HARRY RABINOWITZ S/Sgt CLAUDE M. STRANGE Cpl. EDWARD WOLSZON T/Sgt WAYNE W. WYLEY Tec 4 FRED A. PIDGEON

Tec 5 LEO GROSSWALD Editor

INTRODUCTION

This account concerns itself primarily with our service on the continent of Europe beginning with the operation at Rennes, France. A word or two of explanation about the events and places in England which preceded our entry into France is necessary in order to present a clear picture of our activities in this theatre of war.

The Atlantic had been crossed on the Coast Guard transport, "Wakefield", which was, prior to the war, the United States Line's "S. S. Manhattan". The seven day voyage was uneventful and we arrived outside the port of Liverpool on May 19 th. The docks were so crowded in those pre-invasion days that even in a port as large as this one it was impossible to find a berth for the huge ship. It was not until the next day that a spot was found for the ship to tie up to and it was late afternoon when the organization disembarked.

A convoy of trucks were waiting to transport us thirty-five miles inland to the city of Manchester. Riding through Liverpool we got our first true to life look at something we had often seen in newsreels and papers, the bombed and burned out buildings and homes. A clear view was unobtainable since on each truck twenty-five pairs of GI hands were trying to point out twenty-five different points of interest all at the same time but we were able to see that bombs can create some nasty scenes.

Almost two months were spent in Wythenshawe, a suburb of Manchester. It was here that we learned that a "Tram" was a trolley, a "Tuppince Haypny" (Two pence, half pence), the English equivalent of our American five cent piece and that a "Pub" was a place where you bought a "bitter". Bitters in America are generally associated with pretzels and free lunches. Here too we were besieged by children shouting a phrase that had become common since the American invasion of the British Isles, "Cot'n goom, choom?" Good-natured Bobbies, the English Dick Traceys, were kept busy quelling the small riots which occurred every time a Yank passed out part of his P. X. ration of chewing gum and candy. We began to discover that the English were just like us in many ways.

We were busy. The twenty-six vehicles, numerous tents and many thousands of dollars of equipment and medicines which we needed were requisitioned. The nurses spent hours sewing wrappers and liners for use in our operating rooms. The trucks were waterproofed, the thousand and one various items packed and crated and the 108th became a part of the Third United States Army.

We left Manchester regretfully. We had enjoyed our stay and we were leaving behind many new friendships we had made. A half day's travel by train brought us to White Parish, a small village in Southern England.

After the damp misty weather of central England the South was a pleasure. It was especially beautiful there at that time of the year. The men were housed in pyramidal tents and a few in quonset huts Officers and nurses occupied a thirty room structure located on a knoll overlooking the tents. The building, which looked like Hollywood's idea of an English estate, had elaborate stairways and curious passageways characteristic of an old English dwelling. Main feature of the place-no furniture.

Volleyball, soft ball games, and even long road marches filled our days while we waited. Trips to nearby ancient Salisbury were frequent. Evenings found our enlisted men's band playing on the terrace outside the mansion and we joined them in song. We seemed to be drawing closer to one another knowing that we would soon sail for France. Then came the day and we were Southampton bound.

There we boarded the English Troop transport "Devonshire" and sailed for "Utah Beach" on the Normandy coast. We landed on De plus 55, the day the Third Army officially went into action. The landing was made on assault barges, the men clambering down a steel ladder into the tossing crafts waiting alongside our transport.

Once ashore, we began a seven mile march inland to the large assembly area where we were to spend our first night on the continent. Walking along the beach we saw the shattered hulks of the invasion crafts, pill boxes and coastal fortifications torn apart by the hail of shell fire that the navy had poured in. Everywhere there were torn strands of barbed wire, fox holes, shell holes, destruction. We walked on paths carefully marked off by lines of white tape. No one wandered outside these strips, for on both sides of the lane, signs in big red letters merely said, "Mines".

Reaching our camp site, we pitched our pup tents, and prepared to pull out in the morning. The day had been hectic, and unable to smoke or light fires because of the stringent black-out regulations, we went to sleep early. The sounds of gun fire not too far off did not deter us from slumber. Even the uneasy ones slept, and most of us were uneasy.

Morning found us moving through the narrow rutted roads of Normandy. The dust that filled the air, caused by the thousands of heavy tanks and vehicles which had travelled here, settled on the hodgerows and the fields. Everything seemed to be covered with this yellow dust.

At noon we pulled into a field a mile outside of the coastal resort town of Carteret, about eighteen miles south of Cherbourg. Here we were to remain until ordered into operation. The tents were quickly set up and with nothing else to do except keep ourselves and living quarters in order, we looked around for ways to spend our time.

As we drove into the camp site a group of peasants gathered offering "Cognac, Cognac!" This was our initiation into the exhorbitant costs of French merchandise, for naturally, there were many customers. "Cognac", however was but an alias, a disguise for "Calvados" the essence of hard cider. To the unfamiliar it is best described as an ingredient, which if added to straight grain alcohol, makes the alcohol really intoxicating. This commodity was available in varying amounts until we left France but it never was very popular.

The succeeding days found us tormenting the civilians with our school-boy French or trying to carry on a conversation with the aid of a GI French-English dictionary. Masters of the art of pantomine were put to shame when the average GI tried to trade a package of cigarettes for a couple of fresh eggs. Unwary bystanders had their eyes poked out by flying hands drawing a picture in the air of what was supposed to be a chicken. Other Joes flapped their arms and crowed. Little wonder that the French were amazed. Eggs were a delicacy for us since fresh eggs were seldom shipped over seas because the powdered variety took up far less precious shipping space. We spent some of our time swimming off the beach at Carteret and consuming huge amounts of doughnuts and coffee at the Red Cross Club which had begun to function there.

Six days passed in this fashion when we received the orders sending us into operation for the first time. It was Sunday morning, August 6. "This is it" ran through our minds as our vehicles wheeled into line at dawn. The members of the organization paused and knelt beside the road while a short service was held by the Chaplain. Most of us felt fortified spiritually when we climbed aboard the trucks and started southwards to Rennes.



The Chippendales were Missing!



All Aboard!



H. M. S. Devonshire



Over the side



Hello France!

THE HOSPITAL AT WORK



Direct from the battlefield



... to Receiving Ward and a comforting hand.



Preparation for Surgery



The Operation



The Finishing Touch



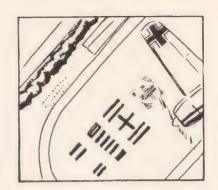
Convalescence begins in the ward



Progress Observed in the Laboratory



"The Lord is My Strength . . ."



RENNES

Most of us will not forget the ride down the Cotentin peninsula to our first setup at Rennes. We were excited, naturally, at the prospect of putting into practice the training we had received in the class room and on maneuvers in Tennessee. The sun was brilliant that Sunday morning and the road was lined with happy cheering people. It was just two days since the Third Army's tanks had swept through this territory and the peasants dressed in their few remaining bits of Sunday finery were out in strength to celebrate their first "free" Sabbath in four years. The women and girls were laughing, waving, offering pretty bouquets of flowers. And at every point that the convoy slowed down the men rushed out to offer bottles of cider and cognac. We dubbed it "The Glory Road" and most of us were beginning to think that Sherman had been wrong. This business of war didn't seem too bad. We soon found how wrong we were.

Before sundown we pulled into a large green meadow shielded by a thick woods near one end. The trucks lined the field but the order to unload was not given. We saw the Commanding Officer conferring with an excited Infantry Lieutenant. Soon we got back into the trucks and drove off. The Infantry Officer had carefully prepared camouflaged machine gun nests around the edge of the field to trap a squad of Germans expected to escape from the woods that night. The proposed hospital site was in his line of fire.

Our eventual site was a race track. There was the grandstand, the turf and the barriers for the steeplechase events. We pitched the hospital tents on the greensward inside the track. Some of us from habit started straight for the betting windows but we found that they had been converted into a supply room! Seems that the only thing running that day was us! We ran all over the place, dragging tents, poles and ropes while others dug fox holes-just in case.

The foxholes came in handy on the first night and almost every night in our stay here. Every evening at eleven o' clock, one lone German plane would fly over our area. He was always assurred of a warm welcome from the many anti-aircraft guns ringing the field, but large chunks of flak kept falling onto the race

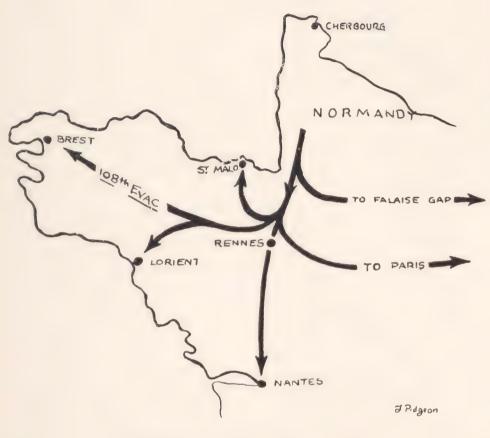
track. The roar of his motor, the chattering of the guns and the flak dropping around us, sent us racing for the holes. Never did so many travel so far so fast. We called him "Bed Check Charlie" because of his nightly punctuality in tucking us in.

When we opened the hospital we were swamped. The wounded poured in on us in great amounts and we began to realize that war was terrifically hard work. Doctors, nurses, enlisted men worked and grew weary. No one thought of himself. The unspoken slogan was "Take care of the boys". And as they worked, eyes and hearts alike cried. Torn bodies, mangled bones, burnt flesh. You couldn't stop while they needed your help. It didn't matter if the flesh was white, black, American, French, or even German. They were men in pain. Many were from the spearheading 4th Armored Division and the veterans of D-Day, the 8th and 29th Infantry Divisions, which we were supporting. We did all that we could. If those few moments before we slept were disturbed by the pitiful sights we had seen, there was also satisfaction for having helped to repair the damage.

We stayed at Rennes two weeks. And when the tides of war rolled swiftly on leaving us too far behind the lines of battle we had to move. But we moved surely, confidently. For now we were a team, we had proved ourselves. We were ready for the next job, certain of our ability to help.

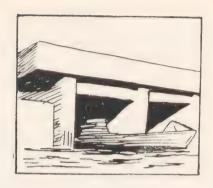


The First Race



SPLIT-UP OF THE THIRD U.S ARMY





BREST

Let's look at the war picture on the day we left Rennes, it was Tuesday, August 22, 1944. Patton and his tanks were making history. Having swept down upon Rennes, the Third Army split up. The left flank turned eastward to begin the action which resulted in the sealing of the Falaise Gap in conjunction with the First Army. This move trapped thousands of men and much material and hurt the Wehrmacht. Patton's center continued on its southwesterly course towards Nantes where it too swung castward towards Paris. The right flank swung northwest from Rennes, driving into picturesque Brittany, towards the great port of Brest at the tip of the peninsula. The port was a major objective since capture of it would rob the enemy of A huge U-boat base and would also supply the Allies with a sorely needed deep water port. Men and material were still landing on the beaches and a port the size of Brest, where most of the Americans landed in World War I, was a prize the Allies meant to fight for. We followed the Third Army to Brest.

We remained in Brittany so long supporting the siege of the fortress, Brest, that the rapidly moving Third Army left us far behind. We were accordingly transferred into the new Ninth Army and remained under their jurisdiction to the war's end. This explanation is offered in order to relieve those at home of any suspicion that the 108th was a unit on the triumphant kissful road to Paris.

We set up our tents on a beautiful spot of land overlooking a river, just outside of the town of Lanillis, nine miles from Brest. Here too, the wounded came rolling in upon us. The 108th Evacuation Hospital was several miles closer to the northern battle lines than other similar units, so a large number of seriously wounded were brought to us to spare them the rigors of a long ambulance ride. We worked at top speed and past our usual twelve duty hours. We were swamped.

We could hear the thundering of our artillery as it pounded the city of Brest. We could also see our bombers dropping their loads on the defenders below. The enemy was entrenched in forts and pillboxes, a great number of which were carved out of the mountainsides. Living quarters, supply rooms, and several large German hospitals were tunneled inside the hills.

The port fell on 22 September 1944 after a siege of weeks. We stayed in the area for a fortnight afterwards and had several opportunities to enter Brest and see the remains of the once thriving city. Its 175,000 inhabitants were homeless, their dwellings were not merely knocked down but were now formless heaps of dust and rocks. Skillful enemy demolitions added to the chaos of the port which was filled with scuttled ships and wrecked cranes. As a harbor it was to be useless for months. We visited the U-boat base and repair shops. We toured the underground installations, amazed at their complexity and at the tremendous stores of food, ammunition and equipment.

While the battle continued, special service units came to entertain our recuperating patients. U. S. O. shows and open air movies became a part of the recreational program and many a GI felt like tossing his crutches aside when the bands blew hot or sweet.

The time we spent here also afforded us opportunities to explore the Brittany peninsula. Its rugged, hilly country, rocky coastline and picturesque natives were a source of pleasure to us. In nearby towns we bought wooden shoes, perfumes and other souvenir items.

This battle for Brest was part of the "Forgotten Front", lost in the headlines that told of the American advance towards the Reich. Those units which had been left behind to take the city, including the 2nd, 8th, and 29th Infantry Divisions, the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions and other supporting units then became a part of the new Ninth United States Army.

We were far behind the main scene of action. But the capture of the port nullified the great submarine base from which the U-boats sailed to prey upon our shipping. It yielded a total of 37,000 prisoners. But the Germans fierce fight was not futile. To give the devils their due, they had deprived us of and then ruined an important and badly needed port.

Our next assignment? No one knew. We packed our equipment and began to move eastwards. This was October the 9th. We did not know that almost two months' time and five hundred miles of Europe were between us and our next scene of operations.



The Road to Brest



Music soothes



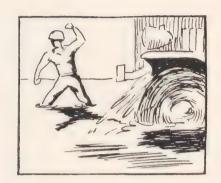
IIth Hour



The Wolfpacks went out



.... their lair was seized.



COUTENCON

It was two months between the time we closed the hospital at Brest until we reopened it again. It was a period of change, inactivity, anxiety, balanced here and there with lighter moments when we had a great many laughs and enjoyed ourselves visiting world famous places. But at the start the mood was one of disappointment.

The summer successes of the Allies had filled us with hope that the war in Europe would end in the autumn. But the extended supply lines, stretched almost to the breaking point when the armies reached the borders of Germany, prevented the deliverance of a knock-out punch. To us, as we retraced our route down the Brittany peninsula, facing an unknown future, it was disheartening.

Our first day's travel ended at Rennes. We camped there for the night and bivouaced the following night at LeMans. The third day brought us to the tiny village of Coutencon, twenty miles south of Paris. Here we set up tents for a stay and we waited for orders.

Constant rain mired us deeply making our daily lives miserable. "General Mud" had defeated many an many and our unit was susceptible. Due to the fact that we were in transit, little or no mail was reaching us. We were not alone in our misery. Other units of the Ninth Army were mudding across France, soon to form together before the Siegfried Line to become one of the freshest, strongest fighting forces on the Western Front.

In the meantime, trips to nearby Fontainebleau, a beautiful town which had once been the summer home of the French emperors were arranged. We visited the exquisitely beautiful Palace of Fontainebleau, our muddy boots treading the rich inlaid wood floors once walked upon by Josephine's dainty slippers. When we apologized for the condition of our shoes to the English speaking guide who conducted the palace tours, he answered us with the neatly turned phrase so characteristic of the gallant Frenchman. He replied, "I would rather see the

muddy boots of the Americans standing here than the polished ones of the German."

And then there were trips to Paris. What can be said of Paris that has not been said many times before! War, occupation, famine and inflation, all had taken their toll but Paris was still Paris. To have missed seeing this great city would have been a misfortune. The passes and transportation given us by our command bolstered our morale. After two weeks is was time to leave the "Mudhole". We looked forward to some dry ground, perhaps billets.



Track slow

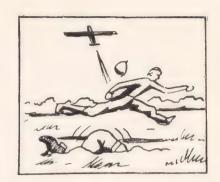


Mudders Day!



Swing it, Sister!





BORGLOON

Our convoy pointed eastward. The winding roads led us past Verdun, historic battleground of World War I. Many of its trenches and battlements were untouched, left just as they were twenty-six years ago. Skirting Luxembourg we entered Belgium and the first night of this journey found us camping in a pine forest near Bastogne, the town which was to become a symbol of American resistance and determination less than sixty days later. Here General McAuliffe and the 101st Airborne Division wrote history in withstanding the German thrust in "The Battle of the Bulge".

The next day at noon we arrived at Borgloon, just outside of Tongres, the oldest city in Belgium. This was to be a rest area for us after the months of work at Rennes and Brest and after the long weary trip we had just made. Only a short time was to elapse before we were wishing we had picked some other region to "rest" in.

We settled in an apple orchard which soon became muddier than the now famous "Mudhole". But that was the least of our worries, for on the second day we saw something which was to haunt us for the six weeks we remained here. It was the V-I pilotless plane, called the Buzzbomb. For six weeks these weapons were a familiar sight. To see them outspeed the fighter planes and anti--aircraft fire which vainly tried to shoot them down was awesome, but when they started to fall around us we weren't awed, we were scared. The Germans were trying to knock-out nearby Liege but faulty calculations caused the bombs to miss the city and drop all too close to us.

The fox holes reappeared in our area once again and few were too fussy about jumping into one even though mud and water had seeped in. Though it must be admitted that it is difficult to decide which would do more damage a buzz-bomb falling close or a jump into a water-logged fox hole at night while still in your underwear. We learned that the stopping of the buzz-bomb's motor overhead meant that it was coming down, but that it would glide far enough

away not to hurt us. When we heard the motor cut out we just waited four or five minutes until we heard the explosion which announced the end of flight. They were, if not of much military value, of great psychological value to the Germans. Since we could not formulate a strong defense which would protect personnel and property from them, they fell in well with the enemy's war of nerves.

Members of the unit, not having a hospital to operate, found time to visit the cities of Liege and Tongres, twelve and three miles away respectively. Buried beneath the 700 year old cathedral in the latter city were the remains of an old Roman fort.

We must include here some mention of Maria. She was a middle aged Belgian who owned a small beer stube whose back yard faced the area in which we were camped. We beat a muddy path through a wire fence to her back door. Her little shop in which she spent long hours every day sweeping, washing and cleaning was nightly tracked with great clods of mud which dropped from our arctic galoshes. No matter how weary Maria was from her chores, which included caring for a few head of livestock the enemy had failed to confiscate upon their flight out of Belgium, she was never too tired to smile and joke as she peeled pound after pound of potatoes, French-frying them for us to eat as we sipped the weak war time beer. Her husband, silent Peter, his eyes twinkling, would go out to the potato patch on the damp cold nights to bring in spuds for the never ending American appetite.

Maria's was a combined U. S. O., Red Cross and social club. In addition we rated her as an unofficial ambassador from the Belgian government to the men of the 108th.



"Buzz-bomb Alley"

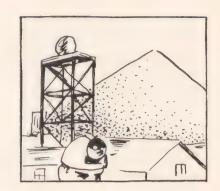


The Foundations were Roman



Slow . . . men working





TERWINSELEN

Leaving Buzz-bomb Boulevard on I December 1944 we moved about thirty miles away, crossing the Belgian-Dutch border near Maastricht. This was the route of the invading Germans in 1940. Here for the first time we operated indoors. The hospital occupied a school house while officers and nurses were billeted in the homes of the friendly Hollanders. The enlisted men set up neat rows of ward tents on the school's athletic field for their living quarters.

It felt good to be back to work again. The volume of patients was far below what had been encountered at Rennes or Brest. Not being too busy, we had the opportunity of meeting the kindly Dutch people. They were close to starvation yet they invited us to visit their homes and insisted we partake of their meager supply of food. They were clean hard working people most of whom were employed in the Queen Wilhelmina coal mines located at the edge of town. These mines are the largest in Europe. Some of us visited the mines and most of us used the showers and baths they had there, a courtesy tendered to allied troops by the mine management.

It was here in Terwinselen that we spent the Christmas holiday. Christmas Eve was observed with services by the Chaplain and the singing of carols. The next evening the mess section outdid themselves with a huge Christmas dinner, complete with all the fixin's. This was followed by a party in which officers and men participated together. We enjoyed ourselves in spite of the fact that all our hearts that night were thousands of miles away from this little Dutch town. The Red Cross girls spent a great deal of time buying a little gift for every member of the organization. After painstakingly wrapping each one, they prevailed on one of our chubbier officers to play the part of Santa Claus. Appropriately costumed, he made us sit on his lap and tell him what we'd like for Christmas. Requests ranged from a bottle of Scotch to Honorable Discharges. Cheery Christmas greetings were exchanged as, at the end of the evening, some turned to quarters for the night while others returned to their all night duties which they had left for just a few moments.

In the middle of this month, the enemy began a strong counter attack which came to be known as the "Battle of the Bulge". Initially his thrust was a success. He was pouring the last of his first line troops and material into this push and we had never seen the Luftwaffe as active as it was now.

German planes came over in the daytime and at night they operated directly over our area. We seemed to be in the center of a ring of anti-aircraft guns. The planes would make their runs and in order to get out of the way of flak, they would fly over us, maneuvering and turning since they were seemingly safe while over us. War takes no holiday and Christmas found them diving down on our tents and machine gunning the nearby streets. The Christmas spirit was sorely missed.

We were operating three and a half weeks when it became imperative for us to move. Heavy casualties from the Bulge, the necessity of being closer to the battle fields and the need for larger quarters sent us on our way once more. We grumbled at having to leave this place, not realizing that we were to move to a location that will be remembered when most of the others are long forgotten. We moved south to Vaals, Holland.



Christmas tinsel



Local miners



VAALS

The little town of Vaals was situated twenty miles from Terwinselen and about one mile from the city of Aachen. The town's eastern edge was the Dutch-German border.

We opened our hospital in Blumenthal which had been, up to the time of the American advance, a convent and girl's school. This was indeed progress, from a race track in France to a convent in Holland! We liked the place immediately. We were welcomed by the staff of nuns that managed the dwellings and civilian help, who did everything to make us comfortable. The main convent building housed the hospital and sleeping quarters of the officers. A nearby dormitory once occupied by the students was used as the enlisted men's quarters.

The buildings were equipped with well lighted rooms, dining halls, bath facilities and completely equipped kitchens. We almost began to feel like civilians again. We made friends of the convent staff and of nearly all the civilians in town. They proudly pointed out the town's one and only point of interest, a hilly spot on the edge of town where the borders of Belgium, Holland and Germany joined.

We photographed ourselves sitting, standing and sprawling over the Dragon Teeth tank traps which were the outer defenses of the Siegfreid Line. We visited Aachen, a great scene of wholesale destruction.

In January the convent's chapel was the scene of the wedding of one of our nurses to an Army Ordnance Officer. The ceremony, its arrangements as complete as any ever held at home was followed by a reception for the entire personnel of the organization. The nuns under the guidance of the Mother Superior decked our dining hall tables with snowy linen, graced with flowers and green sprays over which the bride presided, dressed in her gown fashioned of white parachute silk.

The Blumenthal Convent was also equipped with a fairly large auditorium and stage. The Thespians in the organization promptly got together and with the advice and coaching of the American Red Cross girls, put on a grand musical

revue. They poked good natured fun with their song and script at the Army, the officers and at GI Joe himself. The effort was successful enough to warrant going on the road; and the cast presented the show to nearby units.

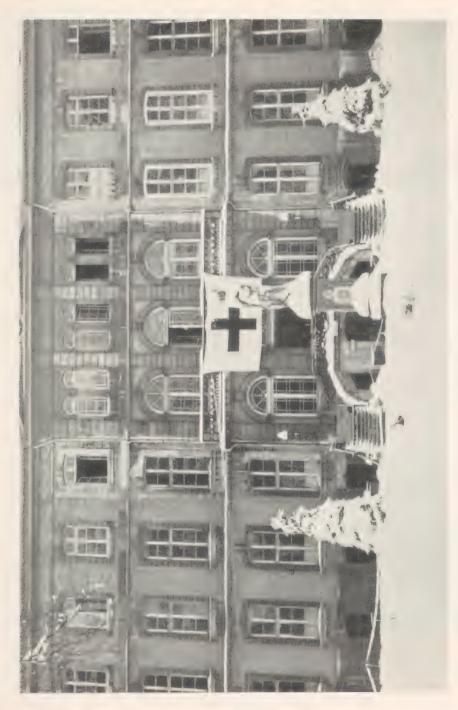
We were busy here, too. From the Ardennes Forest where the Germans were hurling their might against the Allied lines, came loaded ambulances. The bitter winter weather caused numerous cases of Trench foot and frost bite, swelling the totals of patients to new highs. The strong approaches of the Seig-fried line were also taking their toll in blood.

We spent nearly three months at Vaals. Weather and terrain were holding up our drive into the Reich. The Roer River dams, whose explosion by the enemy would drown an attack force, was holding us at bay. First the dams had to be taken and destroyed by the Americans. But one afternoon late in February, the grapevine spread the word that the river had receded and that our troops would force a crossing, ending the deadlock on the river banks.

That night we heard the roaring artillery shelling the Germans fifteen miles away. It was one of the war's greatest barrages and made even us, safe behind the blazing American guns, restless at the noise they made. The next morning the wounded brought back the news that the bridgehead was secured. We knew that we would soon be moving forward with our advancing men.

We were grateful that we had been able to spend the bitter European winter in these comfortable quarters. When we left, the sisters offered us the shelter of the convent if ever the future brought us back to Vaals. Many times in the months since we left their hospitality, our supply missions have brought us back to their doors. We have always found a hearty welcome, a wholesome meal and a peaceful night's slumber at the convent.

We hated to leave the nuns, the people and the town. But we knew as we drove deeper into Germany, that we were hastening the day that we might return to Vaals in peace time.





Belgian-Holland-German Junction



The Dragon's Teeth



In the midst of destruction -- we live



The Chapel



The Sentry



KEMPEN

We moved out through Aachen towards the Roer River. The river which was scarcely wider than a large stream had receded back to normal. We could see however, the high water marks which had broadened the flow to more than three times its usual size. On the east bank were the ruins which had once been Julich, a town of almost nine thousand which was one hundred percent destroyed by the terrific artillery barrage which preceded the crossing of the river.

We arrived at what was left of the city of Kempen, more than half way beyond the Roer and the last barrier to the core of Germany, the Rhine River. We occupied a civilian hospital. The fact that it was one of the few undamaged buildings in the town was a tribute to the accuracy of our bombardiers.

Here the enlisted men took over what had once been a Hitler Youth School as their living quarters while the officers and nurses billeted in homes. The school was located about a city block away from the hospital and we were the recipients of many a cold stare from the small civilian population still remaining as we walked to and from our quarters.

Having broken through the Seigfried Line, the American Armics were poised on the banks of the historic Rhine River. This great water barrier was the last obstacle before the Allies. But, to a military organization which had bridged the English Channel, this was just another operation. On the 23rd of March, exactly one month after the crossing of the Roer, the Allies overcame this great obstacle on the road to Berlin.

This was not entirely an Army show. Huge trucks came up to the river carrying U. S. Navy landing crafts and sailors. Launching their ships, they quickly loaded them with infantry which landed on the opposite banks, securing beachheads. Combat engineers fought and built their pontoon bridges, so that tanks and supply trucks could reinforce the doughboys. If ever the Allies proved their unity it was here at the crossing of the Rhine. Canadians, Englishmen and American, Army and Navy, joined in the swift successful push.

We packed and prepared to follow them. The victory talk and optimism which had died on our lips last Fall was beginning to crop up again. This time we felt there would be no stopping for lack of supplies, nor a Siegfried Line to halt the victory parade.



Hospital Entrance



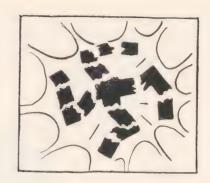
Enlisted Men's Quarters



Destruction was Everywhere



The Rhine Crossing



HIDINGSEL

All of us are familiar with our town or neighborhood hospital. The average American hospital has a capacity of approximately 200 beds. Try to picture then, our unit with its equipment designed to take care of four hundred patients, double the size of the permanent ones at home packing and loading and following after the swiftly rolling tanks. It is an impressive display of the far sighted efficiency of army planning.

But follow them we did! Leaving Kempen, we crossed the Rhine and rolled deep into Germany. We set up in the town of Hidingsel, not far from the large but badly bombed city of Munster. Casualties here were not heavy. The armored forces and truck riding infantry were racing through the crumbling Wehrmacht with only mild resistance.

Daily, huge ten ton trailer trucks rolled passed us, toward the rear, their stake bodies bulging with great loads of German prisoners. The enemy war machine was falling apart.

We were handling some American patients from the armies which were encircling the Ruhr valley but mostly we were encountering a new type of case. These were the men, and women slave laborers, citizens of Russia, France, Poland, Belgium citizens from all the overrun countries that had been under the Nazi heel, who had been taken forcibly from their homelands, and starved and beaten by their German overseers. We treated them and fed them and their appreciation for the smallest kindness was great.

Here too we were able to watch the great migration of these liberated people. On foot and on bicycles, and some on captured German army vehicles, they made haste to leave this hateful country which had been their prison for many years. Many piled their personal belongings on rickety home-made carts, tugging and pulling them on the already overcrowded roads. Nothing mattered except that they must reach the borders where Allied officials were beginning the tremendous task of repatriating them.

Our prime function, of caring for our troops was rapidly diminishing. In the two short weeks we remained here, the fighting had left us far behind again. Once more the tents were struck, equipment packed and loaded and we continued on our way eastward.



Bello slumbers



. . . . as the Wehrmacht cracks



SCHOPPENSTEDT

We journeyed all day, past Hamelin, home of the pied piper legend, across the Weser River, speeding down the wide four lane "autobahn" Hitler's roads designed to carry a victorious German Army, skirting Hannover and finally reaching a point fourteen miles southeast of Brunswick, seventy miles from Berlin.

We drove through the rolling geometrically laid out farm country followed by the half frightened, half defiant glances of the people. Except for American tanks which had preceded us we were the first American troops in this advanced position. No infantry or occupational units had arrived here as yet and the people were on tenterhooks, not knowing whether the German stories of American bloodthirstiness were soon to be proved or not.

We arrived at our location, a large grassy field, late in the afternoon of April the 14th. The hospital was soon ready to operate and we began to receive great amounts of Allied Personnel that had been prisoners of the Germans.

English and American boys arrived from the prisons which the advancing Armies were liberating. Their stories of the inhuman treatment accorded them by their German jailors were painfully illustrated by their skinny faces and shrunken bodies. Their tales of brutality left us aghast. The freed men were dazed and unable to believe their sudden good fortune at falling into friendly hands. One English Tommy, his hand trembling as he held a copy of the Army newspaper, "Stars & Stripes", could barely speak as he told us that it was the first newspaper he had seen since he had been captured, five years before. He protested weakly when he read that Shirley Temple was engaged to be married. "She's but a mite of a child" he said, unable to bridge the five year gap since he had seen his last cinema.

We knew however that the end was near. Twenty miles away on the banks of the Elbe River, the Americans were meeting their fellow conquerors, the victorious Russian Armies. The air was nervy with rumors of peace and everyone expected the long-awaited news momentarily.

Days dragged by. Our ears were glued to every available radio. Little by little, victory came. The disintegration of the German Army was being accomplished in sections.

The surrender at Rheims was anti-climatic but we celebrated. Patients and hospital personnel toasted each other with wine from a truckload of "liberated" beverages some British soldiers brought in.

The cessation of hostilities greatly reduced the amount of work though the hospital continued in operation. Passes to Paris, Brussels and our "European Home", the Blumenthal convent at Vaals, became plentiful. Furloughs to England were also available, and a few of our men returned to Manchester, bringing our friends in that city up to date on our activities.

Sports, too, were beginning to find a place in our daily schedules. Eight teams were organized into a soft ball league which aroused a great deal of enthusiasm. The seven enlisted men's teams loved nothing better than to beat the officer's team and the good natured rivalry and laughter often caused more amusement than the brand of ball displayed.

In a nearby town we had the use of a large indoor swimming pool and everyone availed themselves of it as the days grew warmer and summer approached.

This is written in Schoppenstedt, where we were V-E day. How long we will remain, where we will go, what our individual destinies shall be are all questions which only the future can answer. But it is doubtful that we shall go as a unit.

In almost a year on the continent we have been in operation constantly with the exception of October and November, 1944 when our efforts were expended battling mud, as tiring as any operation. The Army Surgeon has commended the unit for its work. Everyone has done his share, and more, so that we can wind up this compaign with pride in our achievements. But rather than culogize ourselves let us note some of the figures. We feel that the quality of our service has been good, what of the quantity? Admissions from our initial operation at Rennes until V-E day totalled 13,733 including 2,233 of the Enemy. More than half of these had been wounded in battle and nearly 1500 more had been hurt in such accidents as gun shot wounds, vehicle collisions and fires. Surgical operations were performed on nearly half the admissions, or 6,066. It should be born in mind that most patients are not sent to an Evacuation Hospital unless they have more than a minor ailment, but of 10,994 American soldiers entered here, 2317 (21%) returned to duty. One patient in every thousand admitted did not live. To supply and transport the hospital and patients the motor pool trucks drove 467,000 miles. The Mess served well over half a million meals, while Supply fulfilled the demand for nearly six and a half billion Units of the germkiller, penicillin. The Pharmacy section dispensed 21,870 prescriptions and the

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Dental office treated the teeth of 1,367 soldiers, many of whom were outpatients. Figures such as these, and there are other similar ones, break no records, nor have we ever valued quantity over quality. They are, however, concrete evidence that our mission of service has been performed.



Yes, American





This one never "buzzed"



V-E Day



Victory-Freedom-and a long way home

PERSONNEL





Enlisted Men

Officers and Nurses

SECTIONS



Medical Section



Surgical Section



Mess Section



Registrar



X-Ray



Lab and Pharmacy



Hospital Headquarters



Supply



Detachment Headquarters



Motor Pool



TEAMS



The Varsity



"Play Ball"



"The Big Train"



"The Pay-off"



Singer's Gangsters



Middleton's Antiques



Vanderslice's Vagabonds



Strange Creatures



Tartag's Ragbags



Hogan's Hoboes

This space reserved for pictures of Hurley's Hussies and the Stew Kings.

BRONZE STAR WINNERS



FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE IN KEEPING WITH THE HIGH TRADITIONS OF THE MILITARY SERVICE

Lt. Col. WILLIAM H. MERRITT Lt. Col. RICHARD B. WEEKS Maj. WILLIAM J. HOGAN Capt. GEORGE GORIN Capt. PHILLIP V. HALL Capt. EDWARD S. HOFFMAN Capt. JAMES T. NIX Lt. HELEN M. CANER Lt. BLANCHE H. EVAN Lt. MARY A. FARLEY Lt. EUNICE M. HAMRICK Lt. MARIORIE W. KYDD Lt. ALDA B. SEASONGOOD Lt. JAMES L. TAYLOR T/Sgt GEORGE E. HUBBARD S/Sgt JAMES F. WHITLOCK S/Sgt RALPH J. VANDERSLICE Tec 3 VINCENT J, CONNOR Tec 3 RICHARD P. HURLEY Tec 4 ELLIS P. DONOVAN Tec 4 JOHN MYCZEK JR. Tec 4 HARRY RABINOWITZ Tec 4 RICHARD L. SHAY Tec 4 WALTER H. WILKE Cpl. EDWARD WOLSZON Tec 5 ANDREW J. BUDZ Tec & LEONARD H. EYKAMP

also menumedud:

Copt Manwaring

Holin

H. Col. Berlinbuf

mis stewart

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